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DAWN

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Pakistan seeks to boost economic relations with US

Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh highlights regional security challenges; says Kashmir issue remains central to lasting S. Asia stability

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: Pakistan has called for the launch of a high-level economic dialogue with the United States at the earliest and urged a shift in bilateral engagement from geopolitics to geoeconomics during a series of meetings between Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh and senior members of Congress.

Meeting House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, Pakistan's Ambassador to the US said 2026 should be treated as a "year of action" to translate shared intentions into concrete economic cooperation.

"Our focus is shifting from geopolitics to geoeconomics," he said, according to one of two handouts issued after the meeting, and stressed the need for institutionalised engagement in sectors such as energy, defence, minerals, information technology and artificial intelligence.

Ambassador Sheikh said Pakistan's low-cost, high-quality manufacturing base positioned it well to meet growing US market needs, highlighting surgical instruments, textiles and sports goods having strong export potential, noting that footballs manufactured in Sialkot had been used in five consecutive Fifa World Cups.

US State Secretary Marco Rubio recently spoke positively about expanding ties with Pakistan, describing the relationship as one with significant untapped potential. "We see an opportunity to expand our strategic relationship with Pakistan," Rubio said in October 2025, adding that Washington valued Islamabad's long history of cooperation, particularly in counter-terrorism.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Sheikh in his meeting with US lawmakers praised the US president's political judgement and personal engagement in helping de-escalate tensions following the military escalation between Islamabad and New Delhi in May 2025.

According to the handouts, the discussions in Washington also focused on regional security challenges, with the Pakistani ambassador warning that terrorism originating from Afghanistan continued to pose serious threats to Pakistan's security as well as to regional and international peace.

Addressing South Asian tensions, Ambassador Sheikh referred to the events of May 2025 and said India's "irresponsible and aggressive behaviour" had lowered the threshold of escalation in the region. He warned that confrontation between two nuclear-armed neighbours had moved beyond conventional conflict to include advanced technologies.

He cautioned that decisions based on misperceptions or miscalculations could undermine regional peace and reiterated that the unresolved Kashmir issue remained central to lasting stability in South Asia.

KARACHI: Economy, political stability, social development, the PPP's organisational situation, and the promotion of inter-provincial cooperation come under discussion at a meeting of PPP leaders, hosted by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah at CM House on Friday. The Senate chairman, Azad and Jammu Kashmir premier, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governors, Balochistan chief minister, along with provincial ministers, lawmakers, and other notables were in attendance.—PPI / Text by Saleem Shahid

'No talks until PTI allowed to meet Imran'

• Barrister Zafar urges TTAP alliance to push for access to jailed PTI founder • At LHCBA, Achakzai questions how justice can be served 'when oppressor sits with adjudicator'

Dawn Report

LAHORE: As the PTI-led opposition's street mobilisation movement gained momentum, party's senior leader Barrister Ali Zafar on Friday said that no dialogue could be held with the government until it allowed meetings with incarcerated party founder Imran Khan.

He made the remarks while speaking alongside a delegation of the opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP). The delegation is on a three-day visit to the city as part of the opposition's "street movement" to hold political and social gatherings.

Addressing the gathering, Barrister Ali Zafar welcomed the TTAP delegation to Lahore and urged the alliance to use its platform to push for a meeting with Imran Khan, who has not been allowed visitors in recent weeks.

"No talks or dialogue can begin until meetings with Imran Khan are allowed," he said. Zafar assured the TTAP of "full cooperation and support from PTI leaders and workers in Lahore."

He stressed that protecting Pakistan's sovereignty was the top priority at present and said that Imran Khan's release was "the need of the time."

"The government cannot take any step that harms Pakistan's future or goes against the country's sovereignty," he added.

LHCBA address

Meanwhile, addressing lawyers at the Lahore High Court Bar Association, TTAP chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai urged people to stand up for their rights and remain steadfast.

Referring to the Feb 8 general elections, he said everyone was aware of how those polls were conducted. He added that those subjected to injustice would inevitably raise their voices and resort to protest.

In an apparent reference to the judiciary, he questioned how justice could be delivered when the oppressor sits alongside those meant to redress grievances.

Senator Raja Nasir Abbas also addressed the gathering, saying that any movement in which women stand shoulder to shoulder with men is bound to succeed. He said laws across the world recognise the right to life and asserted that oppressive systems do not collapse on their own, but require sustained struggle to dismantle them.

Wajih Ahmed Sheikh in Lahore also contributed to this report

TTAP leaders Mahmood Khan Achakzai, Allama Raja Nasir Abbas and others take part in a seminar at the Lahore High Court Bar Association.—PPI

Interior minister orders strict screening of travel documents at airports

Says elements involved in human smuggling do not deserve any leniency

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi has ordered strict screening of travel documents at airports to prevent illegal immigration and human smuggling and actions of professional beggar mafia.

The orders were given by the interior minister while chairing a meeting to review the performance of Immigration Wing of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

The meeting discussed the ongoing campaign to prevent illegal immigration and human smuggling and actions of professional beggar mafia.

The interior minister's order came amid serious complaints of arbitrary offloading of hundreds of passengers at airports despite travellers carrying valid documents.

In the first week of December, the interior minister had claimed that 50 to 70 passengers were being offloaded daily from flights.

The official figures which recently emerged however showed the real number of offloaded passengers during the year 2025 was three times higher coming to over 66000. During the Friday's meeting, the interior minister gave orders to take strict action against mafia involved in illegal immigration.

"Elements involved in human smuggling do not deserve any leniency," he said. He directed FIA officials to effectively implement immigration laws and make the immigration checking system at airports more transparent and efficient. He also directed an effective crackdown against professional beggar mafia and their backers.

The meeting was attended by federal secretary of interior, additional secretary of interior, director general of FIA, directors of Karachi and Lahore Zone.

Amid fears that genuine travellers would be given a tough time at airports in the name of "strict screening", an official said there were clear directions from the interior minister that no passenger with complete and valid travel documents should be stopped.

He said strict screening coupled with a crackdown against fraudulent visa agents exploiting citizens was meant to curb attempts to use fake or unverified documents.

Following months of growing public fury and social media outrage, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had finally taken notice of massive offloading of people in mid of December and had formed a "special committee" to look into the issue to ensure safe immigration.

Disclosing this, Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis Chaudhry Salik Hussain said by the end of January, "we will prepare proposals to address these issues as safe migration is the fundamental right of the people".

Cancer patients to get subsidised drugs from Pims

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of National Health Services has entered into a five-year agreement with a pharmaceutical company to provide subsidised medicines for cancer patients in federally administered areas. The accord aims to reduce the financial burden of treatment for cancers of the breast, lung, and liver. Under the cost-sharing plan, the government will bear 30pc of the cost, while Roche Pakistan will cover the remaining 70pc.

Therefore, for a patient whose treatment costs around Rs10 million, the government will contribute Rs1 million, while the pharma firm will supply medicines worth Rs9m, according to the health minister.

The project will initially be launched at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) in Islamabad, and will be expanded based on performance.

Under the agreement, thousands of eligible patients from Islamabad, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan will be able to receive subsidised cancer medicine.

Speaking on the occasion, Federal Minister for Health Services and Coordination Syed Mustafa Kamal called the initiative a "landmark step towards reducing the affordability gap in cancer treatment."

"This partnership reflects a strong model of public-private collaboration, which the government intends to replicate in other regions of the country," he said during the signing ceremony.

"This initiative marks the first phase of rebuilding trust in public-private partnerships," Mr Kamal said, adding that successful implementation would lead to more collaborative healthcare projects.

The minister expressed gratitude to Roche Pakistan for its cooperation. The signing ceremony was also attended by Secretary Health Hamed Yaqoob Sheikh, Director General Health, and Roche Pakistan Managing Director Hafsa Shamsie.

The Ministry of National Health Services reaffirmed its commitment to expanding access to life-saving treatments and ensuring equitable healthcare services for all citizens, particularly those from underserved regions.—Aamir Yasin

FCC to begin hearings at Shariat court from 12th

• Law ministry notified FCC's relocation a month ago • Shariat court to move to IHC building

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) is set to finally begin hearing cases from Monday, operating from its originally envisaged premises — the Federal Shariat Court (FSC).

Although extensive renovation and refurbishment work is still under way at the FSC building, an informed source privy to the development told *Dawn* that the FCC is likely to commence functioning from January 12.

On December 11, 2025, the Ministry of law had issued a notification proposing the temporary relocation of the FCC to the FSC premises, while the Federal Shariat Court was to be shifted to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) building.

In addition, the FCC is seriously considering the establishment of registry branches in all four provinces to facilitate the filing of cases and appeals by litigants closer to their homes. However, the establishment of branch registries requires a presidential order, which is also expected to be issued soon.

If set up, these branch registries would help ease the difficulties currently faced by litigants, who are compelled to travel to Islamabad, where only a small space has been allocated for filing FCC petitions within the IHC building.

Under the proposed arrangement, cases could temporarily be filed at FCC branch registries operating from the existing premises of the Supreme Court in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta.

Recently 22,910 cases were transferred from the Supreme Court to the FCC and are currently housed within the IHC. Due to severe space constraints, the files have been cramped into small areas, making it extremely difficult to locate case records or obtain certified copies of judgements.

"I filed a petition before the FCC sometimes ago, but notices to the respondents have still not been served due to a lack of manpower and an effective mechanism," a senior lawyer told *Dawn* on condition of anonymity.

The 27th Constitutional Amendment was passed by parliament within days, but the government has yet to determine how and where to properly house the FCC — now considered the country's apex court following the amendment, the lawyer said.

The source added that while more judges will be elevated to the FCC in due course, establishing the court's infrastructure remains the immediate priority.

A meeting of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan scheduled for January 12 may also take up the formulation of rules for appointing FCC judges. After the court's relocation, the next step would likely involve developing facilities for video-link hearings, enabling lawyers to argue cases from branch registries — a practice already in use at the Supreme Court.

The FSC building currently houses seven courtrooms along with seven chambers for judges. The FCC presently has seven judges, with plans to gradually increase its strength to 13.

According to the source, the establishment of additional courtrooms should not pose major difficulties, as office spaces within the building can be merged to create smaller courtrooms if required.

In November last year, the government had decided to set up offices for FCC judges within the IHC building due to space constraints, after FSC judges reportedly declined to vacate their building in favour of the newly established constitutional court.

As a result, the FCC was temporarily housed in the IHC building shortly after the passage of the 27th Constitutional Amendment.

'Workers with 14.5 years of service entitled to pension'

• FCC upholds rounding-off principle under Employees' Old-Age Benefits Act • Dismisses five appeals filed by EOBI against LHC judgements

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Friday affirmed workers' right to pension, holding that employees with fourteen-and-a-half years or more of service are entitled to a monthly pension under the "rounding-off" principle provided in the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Act, 1976.

The ruling came as a three-judge FCC bench, headed by Chief Justice Aminuddin Khan and comprising Justice Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi and Justice Arshad Hussain Shah, dismissed five appeals filed by the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) against Lahore High Court's judgements that had ordered the grant of pension to the workers who had completed between 14.75 and 14.86 years of insurable employment.

The EOBI had denied pensions to five employees — Muhammad Rafique, Muhammad Yaqoob, Shahbaz Hussain, Muhammad Imran Butt and Rashed Anwar — on the ground that they had not completed the mandatory 15 years of insurable employment under Section 22(1)(b) of the Act.

Authored by Justice Rizvi, the 16-page judgement held that it is a settled principle of administrative law that when a public authority, through consistent conduct or an express representation, creates a legitimate expectation in favour of beneficiaries, such expectation cannot be defeated arbitrarily or capriciously.

The verdict said that the doctrine of legitimate expectation, consistently recognised by the country's superior courts, obliges public institutions to act fairly, consistently and in a non-discriminatory manner, particularly where rights and benefits under a social welfare scheme are involved.

Justice Rizvi observed that the principle of promissory estoppel restrains a public authority from resiling from a position consciously adopted and acted upon by affected persons, unless an overriding public interest so demands and such departure is sanctioned by law.

No such overriding public interest was established in the present case, nor did the statutory framework permit withdrawal of pensionary benefits through a subsequent executive circular, he said.

The court acknowledged that while an authority empowered to make an order generally also has the power to rescind or modify it, this principle is subject to a well-recognised exception.

Once an order has taken legal effect and rights have accrued in favour of an individual, it cannot be withdrawn to the detriment of those vested rights.

Justice Rizvi observed that the rounding-off provision in the schedule to the Act is not merely computational but forms a substantive part of the pension eligibility framework.

It is designed to prevent "technical disqualifications" arising from marginal shortfalls.

The FCC noted that EOBI's Circular No. 1/2022, which sought to exclude rounding-off for determining eligibility, could not override the statutory schedule. EOBI's 2019 circular had correctly applied the rounding-off rule and that the 2022 circular could not retrospectively take away vested rights, it observed.

The court explained that while 15 years of service remains mandatory, the schedule creates a deeming provision under which a period of six months or more is treated as a full year. Accordingly, workers with 14.5 years or more of service are deemed to have completed 15 years of insurable employment.

"Once the schedule is applied in its proper perspective, the five employees cannot fall short of the mandatory requirement," the judgement said.

The FCC also rejected EOBI's contention that the schedule applies only after eligibility is determined, holding that such an interpretation would render the rounding-off provision "redundant and ineffective."

The court dismissed all five civil petitions and connected applications, refusing leave to appeal, and reaffirmed the pro-worker intent of pension legislation.